THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Yes, Sir. Requests have been received from the State Governments of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka for the removal of ban on export of onions. Representations were also received from farmers' associations and traders.

(c) The Government has permitted partial lifting of ban on export of Bangalore Rose Onion, small quantities of Krishnapuram onion, and has allowed export of 3000 MTs of all varieties of onion to Sri Lanka through N.A.F.E.D. Permission has also been granted for the export of 25,000 MTs. of onions per month for next three months through an agency to be designated by the Government of Maharashtra or by the Associate Shippers registered with the designated agency. While deciding to lift the ban partially, the Government has kept in view the interest of consumers also.

Tea Auction Centre at Guwahati

649. SHRI KARNENDU BHATTACHARJEE: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that there is no Tea Auction Centre at Guwahati; and

(b) if so, whether Government plan to set up one Tea Auction Centre at Guwahati in view of great demand from Tea Industry for quite a long time?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) No, Sir. A Tea Auction Centre has been functioning at Guwahati since September, 1970.

(b) Does not arise.

Tea Research Sub-Centre at Taklai

650. SHRI KARNENDU BHATTACHARJEE: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have any plan to set up a sub-centre at Taklai at Silchar in Cachar District of Assam to monitor the work/progress in that area where there are more than 100 Tea Gardens, since there is a Tea Research Centre already working in Cachar District; and

(b) if so, the details thereof with probable time schedule by which the proposal will materialise?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) and (b) The Toklai Tea Experimental Station is run by the Tea Research Association which is a private body registered under the Societies Act. The TRA has already established an upgraded subcentre with soil analytical lab at Cachar. Scientific support is provided to this sub centre by the base lab of TRA at Jorhat. The Government has therefore no separate proposal to open a sub-centre at Silchar, Cachar.

Free Trade Agreement with Sri Lanka

651. MISS SAROJ KHAPARDE: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have entered into free trade agreement on long term basis with the Government of Sri Lanka;

(b) if so, what are the details in this regard:

(c) in which spheres and to what quantum it would accelerate the trade between the two countries;

(d) whether Government propose to enter into such a free trade agreements with other SAARC countries; and

(e) if so, by when, and if not, the reasons therefor?